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Birkholz's committee moves to ban disposal of contaminants in Michigan waters

LANSING – It would be illegal to dump contaminated dredging materials into any Michigan water under legislation reported out of the Senate Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee this morning, announced committee chair Sen. Patty Birkholz.

The bill would amend the National Resources and Environmental Protection Act to specifically prohibit open water disposal of contaminated dredged substances into Michigan waters —materials that pose a substantial threat to the safety and welfare of the public, environment or wildlife.

“Michigan’s waters are too important and crucial to be using them as a dumping ground,” said Birkholz, R-Saugatuck Township. “It is absurd to think that anyone would consider dumping contaminated dredged materials into our Great Lakes, rivers or inland lakes. This legislation prohibits this abhorrent practice from happening. I expect this will have unanimous support in both chambers and be signed into law as soon as possible.”

While this practice has been prohibited in the past, and there is currently an executive directive banning it, it is not an official law. Legislators want to officially prohibit open water dumping of contaminated dredged materials in order to prevent groups from challenging the ban. At the moment, the Army Corps of Engineers is considering dumping contaminated dredged sediments near ports and harbors along the Great Lakes shoreline.

“In addition to seeing swift action in Michigan, I hope to see this issue taken up soon by the Great Lakes Legislative Caucus as well,” Birkholz said. “All basin states and provinces need to have this prohibition in place to ensure our waters stay clean and usable for generations.”

The bill now goes to the full Senate for consideration.

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